APPAREL merchandising

SEPTEMBER 1983

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POLYESTER: THE END OF THE IRON AGE

PENNEY'S CHALLENGE: BEEF UP SALES

IS IT TOO LATE FOR MADE-IN-AMERICA APPAREL?

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APPAREL merchandising

13 American consumers are buying polyester and poly blends. Both have made inroads in shoppers' wardrobes, according to an *Am*/Gallup survey, due to ease of care and practicality.

17 To spruce up polyester's image, six fiber producers are mounting advertising campaigns to show how versatile polyester is.

21 Polyester's strongest appeal, say retailers, is in fashion blouses and dresses. It's less acceptable to better customers in jackets, skirts and pants.

23 American manufacturers are fighting to keep goods produced in the U.S.A.; retailers maintain they must offer the lowest prices for apparel, regardless of where it is made.

27 Bill Howell, chairman and ceo of J. C. Penney, will handle his new chores as he has his past responsibilities since starting as a store trainee in 1958: direct and to the point.

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DEPARTMENTS

30 The Japanese have launched another invasion—this time into women's wear with "authentic" looks appealing to the avant-garde.

33 One-piece swimsuits constitute 80% of volume since they flatter figures. This year, though, two-piecers saw increased activity.

37 Maxine Kelly of Foley's has worked as a model, in manufacturing and in retailing. Her biggest advantage, though, was in knowing how women shop, especially career women.

41 Brand names are turning up in discount hosiery depts. Entrance of designer names, however, draws mixed reviews.

45 The junior high girl has long been courted. Now Sears and Penney are going after this label- and style-conscious customer.

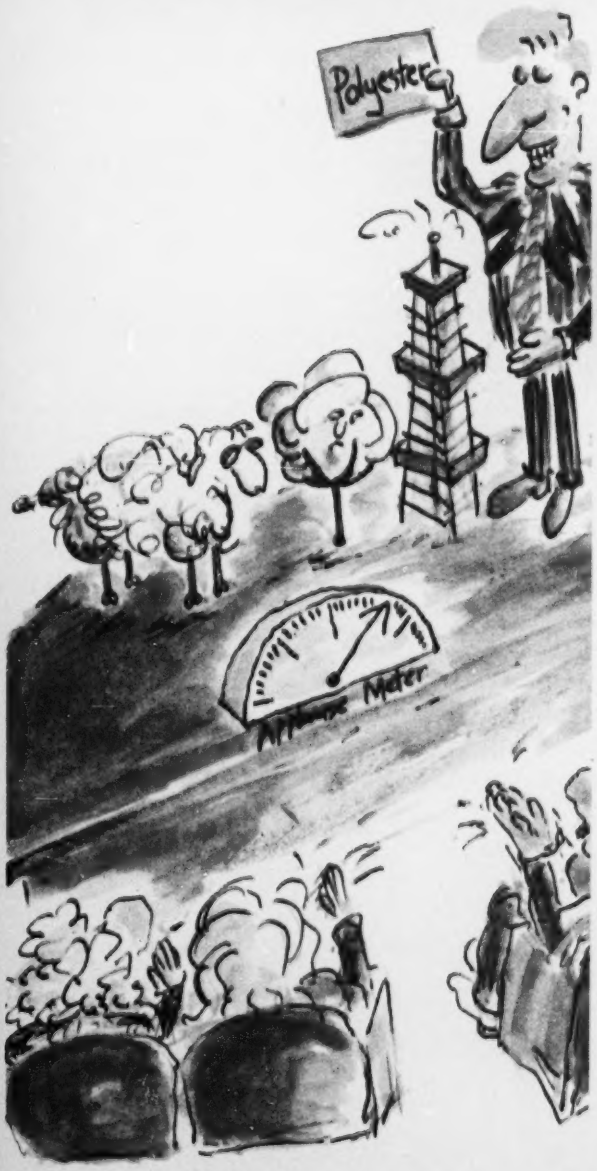
47 Accessories is described as the most innovative in kids' apparel. It's also one of the most profitable, with a better-than-40% gross margin.

49 Novelty looks should help revive sagging young men's jeans sales. But, retailers see no single new look as having a profound influence.

53 Ex-Footballer Moses Denson founded Children's Choice when he couldn't find a store to outfit his daughter. Today, the specialist caters to kids with a preppy preference.

COVER PHOTO BY JEFF GLACZ

New Luster For Polyester



As men and women streamline their existences, many are buying polyester, finding easy-care fabrics that fit their lives.

While men and women may not see eye to eye on many issues, one thing they do agree on is the purchase of easy-to-care-for clothes. No slaves to ironing boards or local dry cleaners are American shoppers. As a result, more men and women are opting for clothes that are polyester blends or 100% polyester.

This is just one of the findings of a poll conducted by the *Am*/Gallup Organization exclusively for *APPAREL merchandising* on consumer reaction to polyester.

As fiber producers mount major campaigns to upgrade the image of polyester, consumers, especially women, are turning to clothes made of polyester. Not only because they are easy to maintain, but also because they wear well, don't wrinkle and won't shrink. In short, the American consumer wants clothes that are practical.

Not however, cheap. This was one of the dominant factors to emerge from the *Am*/Gallup research. If a man, for example, sees a pair of pants he likes that is polyester, wool/polyester blend or wool, he will pay more for the one he likes. So will women spend more for items they like, regardless of fabrications. Consumers may not be buying more apparel, as data from Stamford, Conn.-based Market Research Corp. of America indicates (units remained static in '82), but they are paying more for clothes that please them.

Polyester on her mind

Consumers are buying polyester. When asked do you buy clothes made of polyester, 44% of American women said yes. Moreover, two-thirds are buying polyester blends. Less than 9% voiced a definite no to polyester. Most of these nay-sayers have household incomes of over $25,000. Moreover, they are between the ages of 25 and 44.

For many women, though, polyester has no stigma. If they ever were aware of polyester jokes, they have put them aside. Witness the fact that 43.3% of American women will buy *more* clothes made of polyester than they did last year, according to the *Am*/Gallup research.

Women prefer polyester blends

	Total	Less than $10,000	$10,000 to $14,999	$15,000 to $24,999	$25,000 and over
Prefer all polyester	43.5	55.4	45.2	31.8	42.1
Prefer polyester blends	68.8	54.1	81.7	78.4	74.3
Dislike polyester	8.5	8.1	5.8	6.3	9.3
Don't know	3.3	4.7	—	1.7	2.3

(Responses add up to more than 100% due to multiple answers.)
Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Men prefer polyester blends

	Total	Less than $10,000	$10,000 to $14,999	$15,000 to $24,999	$25,000 and over
Prefer all polyester	29.3	33.3	29.4	29.7	29.4
Prefer polyester blend	65.5	56.0	72.1	64.9	70.9
Dislike polyester	16.2	18.7	16.2	13.5	17.0
Don't know	9.4	10.7	8.8	8.8	3.5

(Responses add up to more than 100% due to multiple answers.)
Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Over 40% of women will buy more clothes made of polyester in 1983

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	50 and over
More polyester	43.3	44.7	37.3	36.4	55.4	46.5
Not more polyester	52.8	51.8	59.6	61.2	37.5	49.4
Don't know	3.9	3.5	3.1	2.4	7.1	4.1

Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Majority of men will not buy more polyester in '83

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	50 and over
Yes	37.8	40.3	39.1	38.2	43.8	33.8
No	51.5	47.1	57.1	55.3	46.9	49.4
Don't know	10.7	12.6	3.8	6.5	9.3	16.8

Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Still, polyester producers and retailers have their work cut out for them. The majority of women between the ages of 25 and 44 said they are not buying more polyester or blends than before. These are the women that represent the target shoppers of all retailers. It is these shoppers who will purchase the most apparel in the 80's. Moreover, they are the ones willing to spend more for clothes they like.

To gain this important customer, producers and retailers should target advertising stressing the fabric's ease of care and its adaptability to high fashion. Polyester garments no longer can be typecast as "cheap."

Men, however, are not as open to polyester as are women. A little less than 30% are buying clothes made of all polyester, while a little over 16% refuse to purchase polyester blends or 100% polyester apparel. Nonetheless, nearly 2 out of 3 are buying clothes that are polyester blends. Men buying blends are by and large the ones aged 25 to 44. They are also the ones who are better educated with household incomes of $25,000 or more.

Next year, 38% of the men said they would buy *more* apparel made of polyester or polyester blends vs. a little over 50% who dissented. Roughly 10% were unsure if they would be purchasing more man-made goods. The majority of naysayers are between the ages of 25 to 44 and have a college education. Income is over $25,000.

Less work with polyester

Polyester and polyester blends have made inroads in shoppers' wardrobes, reveals the *Am*/Gallup research, due to their ease of care. Consumers do not want the hassle of ironing or dry cleaning which is not really necessary with clothes made of polyester. Nonetheless, consumers do cite drawbacks to polyester.

Men like polyester's ease of care

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	50 and over
Easy care	34.2	19.3	33.3	40.7	26.6	40.9
Wears well/ lasts long	23.9	16.8	17.9	24.4	29.7	29.5
Doesn't wrinkle	18.0	7.6	17.9	21.1	23.4	20.3
Comfortable	6.6	13.4	10.3	8.1	3.1	0.8
Doesn't shrink	6.4	10.1	6.4	7.3	6.3	4.2
Price/cheaper	3.6	6.7	2.6	0.8	—	5.1
Nothing	12.3	16.8	12.8	13.8	12.5	8.9
Other	11.0	13.4	12.2	8.1	7.8	11.4
Don't know	10.7	16.0	7.1	3.3	17.2	12.7

(Responses add up to more than 100% due to multiple answers.)
Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Polyester's liability: It's hot, say women

	Total	East Coast	Central	South	West Coast
It's hot	22.4	21.5	21.4	19.9	29.0
Doesn't breathe	9.9	12.6	8.5	7.2	12.4
Snags/pills	8.2	10.3	6.5	7.2	9.0
Way it feels	7.9	9.8	1.5	7.2	15.2
Cheap appearance	7.7	11.7	4.0	3.0	14.5
Holds static/clings	6.4	6.5	5.5	7.6	5.5
Heat melts it	1.3	1.4	0.5	0.3	2.8
Nothing	33.0	29.0	42.3	33.5	25.5
Other	14.1	17.8	14.9	10.2	13.8
Don't know	5.4	3.7	4.5	9.7	2.1

(Responses add up to more than 100% due to multiple answers.)
Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Women rate ease of care most important attribute of polyester

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	50 and over
Ease of care	54.5	35.1	55.4	54.3	50.0	60.7
Doesn't wrinkle	34.5	15.8	30.7	38.0	37.5	41.5
Wears well/ lasts long	16.2	13.2	15.1	14.7	25.0	17.3
Doesn't shrink	7.4	7.0	12.7	9.3	10.7	3.8
Price/cheaper	4.8	5.3	6.6	3.9	3.6	4.4
Comfortable	2.1	7.0	2.4	—	3.6	0.9
Nothing	7.4	6.1	14.5	12.4	3.6	3.1
Other	8.8	20.2	3.6	6.2	1.8	9.4
Don't know	3.0	7.0	1.8	—	—	3.8

(Responses add up to more than 100% due to multiple answers.)
Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Men dislike polyester because it's hot

	Total	East Coast	Central	South	West Coast
It's hot	14.6	16.7	7.4	14.4	22.8
Way it feels	10.4	11.5	11.6	6.2	14.2
Doesn't breathe	9.7	4.0	10.1	8.1	19.7
Snags/pills	7.3	6.3	7.9	9.1	4.7
Heat melts it	5.4	3.4	4.8	6.7	7.1
Cheap appearance	5.0	5.2	8.5	1.9	4.7
Nothing	32.5	30.5	36.5	34.9	25.2
Other	14.9	16.7	11.6	14.8	17.3
Don't know	10.3	10.3	11.1	12.4	5.5

(Responses add up to more than 100% due to multiple answers.)
Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Poly/wool slacks are choice of men

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	50 and over
All wool	24.9	25.2	29.5	21.1	15.6	26.2
All polyester	25.0	21.8	27.6	22.0	4.7	32.1
Wool/polyester blend	38.5	39.5	37.8	46.3	65.6	27.0
Don't know	11.6	13.5	5.1	10.6	14.1	14.7

Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

The largest number of women (a little more than 1 in 5) claim that polyester is "hot." Couple this response with that of "it doesn't breathe," and the result is roughly 30% are dissatisfied. Women in the South and West are particularly mindful of these problems. Today cheap appearance only bothers 7.7%, just as "the way it feels" annoys less than 8%.

Women with household incomes of over $25,000 registered the loudest dissent about the look of polyester. Nearly 15% complained about its poor appearance, as did 13.5% of women with college educations. The college educated also felt more strongly about polyester being "hot." Nearly 1 in 4 nagged about this problem. They are also the most vocal about the way it feels: 1 in 10 do not like polyester's hand.

Still, 1 in 3 American women says nothing is wrong with polyester. Again, retailers take note: Women with household incomes of over $25,000 were more negative than women on the whole. A little over 22% of affluent women say polyester is O.K.

Men do not feel quite as strongly as women about the negatives of polyester. "It's hot" was the complaint of less than 15%, while "it doesn't breathe" was echoed by about 10%. The "way it feels" was the only other dissatisfaction that drew a double-digit answer.

Most of the criticism is leveled by men with college educations and who earn more than $25,000. For example, "it's hot" was a concern of 1 in 5 well-heeled men. In addition, a

Wanted: Cotton/polyester blend blouses by women

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	50 and over
All cotton	29.3	33.3	33.7	32.6	26.8	25.5
All polyester	12.9	8.8	6.0	7.8	3.6	21.7
Cotton/polyester blend	54.5	54.4	56.6	58.9	69.6	48.1
Don't know	3.3	3.5	3.7	0.7	—	4.7

Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

Nearly 50% of consumers buy their apparel at department stores

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	50 and over
Department stores	45.8	34.8	50.9	50.4	47.5	44.9
Specialty stores	20.7	28.3	18.0	19.0	21.7	19.3
Discount stores	15.7	20.6	20.2	15.1	17.5	11.0
Sears	11.4	8.2	7.8	15.1	12.5	13.3
Penney	10.1	6.9	7.8	9.5	6.7	14.1
Montgomery Ward	2.6	2.6	1.6	2.0	—	4.1
Off-price store	3.7	4.3	4.7	5.2	—	2.9
Catalog/mail order	0.9	0.4	0.9	2.0	—	0.9
Other	3.1	2.1	2.8	2.4	—	4.7
Don't know	3.5	2.1	3.1	0.4	3.3	5.9

(Responses add up to more than 100% due to multiple answers.)
Source: Gallup Organization for *APPAREL merchandising*

little over 13% of the affluent men did not like "the way it feels."

When women shop for blouses, it comes as little surprise that they prefer fabrications that are easy to care for. In this case, it means a polyester/cotton blend over all cotton or all polyester. Over 50% say they will buy a blend, and what's more, they are willing to pay more for this blouse. If they are buying pants, a blend again is their preference. More women choose wool/polyester blends than all wool or all polyester. Only in jackets do women opt for an all natural purchase (wool over polyester/wool blend or 100% polyester), thus indicating manufacturers and retailers may not be offering enough attractive polyester items in this category.

Men, however, are more inclined toward natural fabrications when selecting shirts and blazers. But when purchasing pants they turn toward blends. Men choose, for example, an all cotton shirt over a blend or 100% polyester. The voting is close, however: 41.8% opt for all cotton, while 41.3% select a blend. The blazer outcome is less tight: 40.6% purchase all wool, while 34.5% want a wool blend. Wool/polyester slacks are, however, a clear choice for nearly 40% of male shoppers. One in 4 buy all polyester slacks, followed by 24.8% favoring all wool. Like women, men will pay a higher price for an item they like.

Shoppers prefer department stores

Where are shoppers buying these goods? A little less than 50% of American men and women are heading to department stores. Despite the aggressive posture taken by catalog chains such as Sears and Penney toward becoming "national department stores," over 50% of the women in the United States who are between the ages of 25 and 44 shop stores such as Macy's, Dayton's and Robinson's. And a little less than 50% of United States men shop these stores. Department stores draw the best-educated and most affluent men and women. No other store type can claim this allegiance.

Nearly 1 in 4 shoppers, however, are going to catalog chains, with Sears leading the way. Specialty stores garner a 20% market share among all shoppers, with discounters tagging on their heels, posting a 15.7% share among men and women. Discounters surprisingly, however, attract more women between the ages of 25 and 44 than do specialty stores or catalog chains. Discounters, for example, draw 23.5% of women aged 25 to 34 vs. Sears' 6% and Penney's 9%. Specialty stores catch 11.4% of this group. Now consider women aged 35 to 44. Discounters draw 20.2% of these women as opposed to Sears' 11.6% and Penney's 10.9%. Specialty stores garner 15.5% of these women.

Consumers are still, however, not shopping in great numbers by mail or phone. Less than 1% prefer this method.

Both men and women are familiar with the six leading fiber producers' brand names. Women voiced the greatest recognition of DuPont's Dacron® (89.4%) and Celanese's Fortrel® (75.3%). Eastman Chemical's Kodel®, Hoechst's Trevira®, American Enka's Golden Touch® and Avlin's Avtex®, in that order, followed. Men ranked them the same way as women, although Dacron had a more commanding lead, according to the Gallup data. *Am*

Sales Dip In East, But Make Waves Elsewhere

One-piece suits are sales pacers, but two-piecers gathered steam, as some women looked to flaunt their figures.

While all swimwear buyers agree that June was a "blaster" month, they are divided about July and August results. For many located on the East Coast, July proved to be a disappointing month. Elsewhere, however, sales continued at a brisk pace.

This may play havoc with year-end results as nearly one-third of the swimwear business occurs on the East Coast, according to research done by *APPAREL merchandising*. What's more, as most East Coast stores broke sales earlier than the rest of the country, at the end of June, numbers will reflect discount prices.

As it is, most stores do the bulk of their swimwear volume on sale. Department stores, for example, sell 62% of swimwear at off price, while catalog chains sell 54%. Specialty stores do 59% of their volume at sale prices. Even discounters sell the majority of their swimwear (61%) at slashed prices.

Most department store buyers are finding consumers will purchase suits at $40 or less at full price, while those suits costing more than $40 are most likely to be bought on sale.

Industry observers point out stores may be doing more harm than good by discounting swimwear early in the season and closing it out Sept. 1 as gross margins are higher in swimwear than in women's sportswear.

This year it was business as usual as consumer attention centered around one-piece suits, in particular a one-piecer from Jantzen, which was a striped cotton Lycra suit with belt, priced at $37. The suit was a hit on the East Coast as well as the Midwest and West Coast. At one store based in the Sunbelt, over 800 pieces were sold. At Minneapolis-based Dayton's, the suit was a star in the department's promotional activity.

One-piece suits in general make up over 80% of swimwear sales, primarily, say buyers, because it is most flattering to women's figures. This year, though, some buyers saw increased action in two-piece suits at the beginning of the season. The Dayton's buyer attributes this sales spurt to women who have whipped themselves into shape during the winter and are interested in showing off their bodies early in the season.

This year, sales began slowly across the United States as weather, a key factor, was not on the side of swimwear buyers. "We had a sluggish March," says the buyer at Phoenix, Ariz.-based Diamond's. As a result, sales did not really start until the end of May. On the East Coast, a cool and rainy May put a damper on sales until June, when they exploded. Even in the Midwest sales did not wake up until June and July, says a buyer for a Chicago-based department store chain.

For many East Coast stores, however, business began to taper off after the price break at the end of June. Thanks to hefty double-digit sales increases—many running over 20%—most stores anticipate staying even with last year's figures.

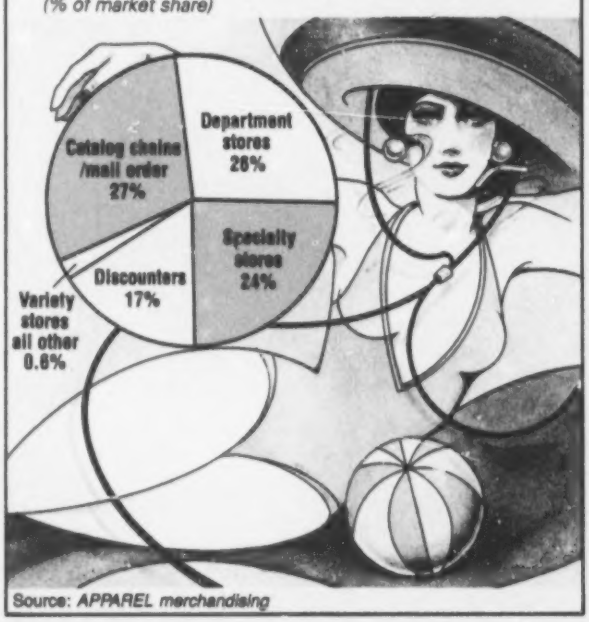
A few buyers blame the downturn in sales to the fact that there really was not much new merchandise offered this year. As one buyer for a New York-based department store chain put it, "Dots, stripes and color splicing have been around. Even matlissé, touted as new this year, has been around."

A few buyers blame the downturn in sales to the fact that there really was not much new merchandise offered this year. As one buyer for a New York-based department store chain put it, "Dots, stripes and color splicing have been around. Even matelassé, touted as new this year, has been around."

As a result, buyers are mixed about preview '84 swimsuits. While many are fired up about the new looks, citing animal skin patterns, waist-high cuts and new shapes as sales stimulators, a few fear these "extreme" styles will not drive consumers into purchasing more bathing suits this year. Am

Catalog chains plunge ahead in swimwear sales

(% of market share)



Source: *APPAREL merchandising*